

Oberlin Unitarian Universalist Fellowship “Still We Dream”



Sunday, January 15
Cal Frye, service leader
Katie Cross, pianist
Matthew Rasmussen, Chalice lighter

Gathering Music

#348, *Guide My Feet*¹ & "Unity" by Glorraine B. Moone and Rev. Freddie Washington

Welcome and Announcements

Lighting the Chalice, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.²

"I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant. ... Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."

Opening Song: #121, *We'll Build a Land*³

Joys and Concerns

Reading,

#662, *Strange and Foolish Walls*, Rev. A. Powell Davies⁴

I invite you to read with me #662, Strange and Foolish Walls, by Rev. A. Powell Davies, minister of our All Souls Church in Washington DC in the forties and fifties. Rev. Davies was a strong liberal voice for human rights, and championed integration in Washington and elsewhere. In remembering the joys and concerns just shared, let's read his words together.

Story For All Ages,

Back of the Bus, by Aaron Reynolds, Floyd Cooper, ill.

Children Leave for Classes

#413, *Go, Now, in Peace*⁵

Reading, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.⁶

We have a task; let us go out with a "divine dissatisfaction."

Let us be dissatisfied until America will no longer have a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds.

¹ Unitarian Universalist Association, *Singing the Living Tradition*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993. #348

² MLK, Jr., Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, 10 December 1964, reproduced in James M. Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1986. p.226.

³ Unitarian Universalist Association, *Singing the Living Tradition*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993. #121

⁴ Unitarian Universalist Association, *Singing the Living Tradition*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993. #662

⁵ Unitarian Universalist Association, *Singing the Living Tradition*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993. #413

⁶ MLK, Jr., "Where Do We Go From Here," 1967. reproduced in James M. Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1986. p.251-2

Let us be dissatisfied until those that live on the outskirts of hope are brought into the metropolis of daily security

Let us be dissatisfied. Let us be dissatisfied until from every city hall justice will roll, roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Let this affirmation be our ringing cry, It will give us the courage to face the uncertainties of the future.

When our days become dreary with clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in the universe,

working to pull down the mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows.

Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

Offertory:

Rev. King believed that laws were important for change, but that the new laws needed to support the growth of African American communities and their economic power so that the daily experience of African Americans would be more empowering.

In 1966, King joined the doctors of the Medical Committee for Human Rights in a march to encourage African Americans to vote. The doctors of the Medical Committee advocated that all citizens deserve to have access to quality health care. After a marcher died because he could not get proper health care, King arranged the press along the road where he was marching and "gave this blistering attack on the segregated health care system in Mississippi that had denied this man adequate medical care."

For over 25 years, the Lorain County Free Clinic (LCFC) has played a significant role in bringing access to health care to the medically uninsured in Lorain and eastern Erie counties.

The LCFC is headquartered at 3323 Pearl Avenue in Lorain, Ohio in the basement of Christ Lutheran Church, and was initiated by a group of local clergy from the Lutheran Co-operative Ministry. Area physicians and community activists joined to help respond to the growing needs of the uninsured, primarily in the city of Lorain during the recession of the 1980's. The Lorain County Free Clinic originally began serving the community in March, 1986.

The Free Clinic is a volunteer driven organization. Area hospitals and medical professionals continue to donate time and services. Last year alone, the medical community donated 3.1 million dollars in charitable care.

The medical and lay communities donated over 6,500 hours of time with an operating budget less than \$400,000. For every dollar donated to the Free Clinic, \$8 in care is provided to an uninsured patient between the ages of 19-65. The Free Clinic is a service of last resort for many.

In 2011, the Free Clinic registered over 5,500 patient encounters. Currently, over 200 individuals volunteer in some capacity for the Free Clinic. The Clinic has locations in Lorain, Oberlin and Elyria.

The community as a whole has sustained the work of the Free Clinic through generous grants from private foundations, private contributions from individuals, corporations, religious institutions and civic organizations, as well as funds generated from special events.

This year it is estimated that 48 million Americans will go uninsured. With ever-increasing health care costs, including escalating costs for employer sponsored insurance plans and prescriptions, Lorain County will continue to experience its ever-increasing share of uninsured individuals—estimated to now be 35,000 people at any given time throughout the year.

Today, the Lorain County Free Clinic needs support more than ever. With our sluggish economy, the decline in volunteer availability and the ever increasing patient demand has pushed the clinic to near capacity. The clinic seeks medical providers to volunteer once a month. Medical Liability insurance coverage is provided at no charge!

Despite the uncertainty of health care reform, the Free Clinic must and will remain a key component to the health care delivery system in the community well into the future, as there will most certainly be a percentage of the population that will be uninsured. Once a month is all it takes! The time commitment is minimal, yet the impact enormous! While we cannot ask for your time right now, we will gladly collect your donations.⁷

As always, please mark your pledge checks or envelopes for the Fellowship, all other donations in January will go to the Free Clinic.

Homily, Cal Frye, "Still We Dream"

The Reverend Martin Luther King has been lionized and demonized, analyzed and scrutinized. His words have been deconstructed and reconstructed, his speaking style and cadence dissected with a microscope, and his politics questioned to the point of his being subjected to FBI surveillance for years. And yet here we are, memorializing him annually.

⁷ Paul Baumgartner, Director, Lorain County Free Clinic, *personal communication*

What a task I have this morning! How can I attempt to sermonize on one whose entire body of work is one great sermon after another? This “bible” here [hold up “A Testament of Hope” edited by James M. Washington] is merely the “essential writings and speeches” by Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. I am not up to the task. I cannot.

I would not put words in his mouth, but I cannot avoid the related sin of selective quotation. There is simply too much material from which to select that I can only hope my work here today is a reasonably accurate representation of Martin Luther King and his words. Indeed, Dr King quoted himself often, or at least returned to several strong themes over and over in his speeches and sermons. Not that many won't try speaking on his behalf. For one whose words, written and spoken, are recorded in such volume, it boggles the mind that there are all kinds of people who would tell you what King “really said” or “would have said” on topics of today. Even his family doesn't agree on the details. Yet his words changed a country.

A few months ago, Phyl and I traveled to Washington on a sort of UU pilgrimage, mainly to see some of the original books Jefferson used to assemble his version of the Bible. Another of our destinations was the new memorial to Dr. King, shown here. There are many quotes from his sayings around the site. The design motif of the sculpture is the phrase, “from a mountain of despair, a stone of hope” and depicts King himself as hewn from that very stone. It also sets him in dialogue across the Tidal Basin with Thomas Jefferson, who owned slaves he could not afford to set free. King's is the first monument to a single individual who was never President to grace our National Mall. Why this man? Because he was an American who loved his country even knowing it's deepest flaws. Because he had faith it could be bettered. And because his words speak to us with resonance, and I think they ring that small bell of hope within us, and keep us going even past the mountains and obstacles.

What I find in this volume of words, in this too-short life in which a movement was raised, is a powerful confidence. Through disappointment and despair, over barriers and after beatings and bombings, Rev. King still hoped, still knew not only was his cause just but that it *would* overcome.

In one of his last messages, he discussed having gone to the mountaintop, and from there he assured us we would indeed make it to the promised land. What did he see from that mountaintop? Beyond lay the mountain of civil rights, and he could see the mountain of voting rights, and another of economic rights, and the mountain of health care just behind, on and on, all the way to the mountain of world peace. Just in the distance there, he could see that promised land beyond.

Yet he did not stop, sit down discouraged over the distance yet to be traveled. He didn't stop even when he thought that, like Moses, he might not make it there himself. Though he would not make it over that mountain, he could see that promised land in his mind's

eye, he knew it in his heart. What's more, he told us to keep hoping, that with conviction and hope, no goal would be out of the reach of dedicated people working for justice. Of all the things you hear about Martin Luther King this weekend, I would have you remember hope.

He had a powerful dream, this man. We share this dream. We still dream of what this country and this world could be. We will build that land yet. Our guide stars on the journey include inspirational people, not just movement leaders like Martin Luther King, but also those like Rosa Parks and others in the civil rights movement, whose small acts of defiance formed the levers which eventually moved the world.

Still we dream. Today marks the beginning of a special effort of the Standing on the Side of Love campaign, thirty days from now until Valentine's Day. Clever, no? The Unitarian Universalist Association sponsors this campaign as the umbrella for many acts of social justice. With luck, some of these may prove as inspirational as those of the Civil Rights movement.

As Rev. Julie-Ann Silverman-Bunn put it, "We are standing on the side of love when we seek to house the homeless. We are standing on the side of love when we seek to feed the hungry. We are standing on the side of love when we seek clean water for those who have none. We are standing on the side of love when we make health care available to those in need of preventative medicine and medicine to heal their bodies. We are standing on the side of love when we offer education to those who have gone without knowing the joys of learning. We are standing on the side of love when we reunite families separated by war and government policies. We are standing on the side of love when we offer all people the choice of marrying their partner. We are standing on the side of love when we recognize that love makes a family. We are standing on the side of love when open our hearts to all people as they are accepting one another and encouraging each other's spiritual growth."⁸

Still we dream. And Martin Luther King reminds us to not stop dreaming, to not give up hope.

Here's an example, from Rev. King's last address as president to the Southern Christian Leadership Committee at their convention in 1967. At this time, King's nonviolent movement was being challenged by those who would use stronger language and methods. But King had visited with Ghandi in India, and had the example of Jesus always in front of him. Amidst the grumblings of even the SCLC, this is how he concluded his remarks:

⁸ Julie-Ann Silberman-Bunn, <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/sermons/submissions/184619.shtml> as accessed 1/15/2012.

"...I say to you today that I still stand by nonviolence. And I am still convinced that it is the most potent weapon available to the Negro in his struggle for justice in this country. And the other thing is that I am concerned about a better world. I'm concerned about justice. I'm concerned about brotherhood. I'm concerned about truth. And when one is concerned about these, he can never advocate violence. For through violence you may murder a murderer but you can't murder murder. Through violence you may murder a liar, but you can't establish truth. Through violence you may murder a hater, but you can't murder hate. Darkness cannot put out darkness. Only light can do that.

And I say to you, I have also decided to stick to love. For I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind's problems. And I'm going to talk about it everywhere I go. I know it isn't popular to talk about it in some circles today. ...I'm talking about a strong, demanding love. And I've seen too much hate. I've seen too much hate on the faces of sheriffs in the South. I've seen hate on the faces of too many Klansmen and too many White Citizens Councilors in the South to want to hate myself, because every time I see it, I know that it does something to their faces and their personalities and I say to myself that hate is too great a burden to bear. I have decided to love. If you are seeking the highest good, I think you can find it through love. And the beautiful thing is that we are moving against wrong when we do it...

...we...must address [ourselves] to the question of restructuring the whole of American society. There are forty million poor people here. And one day we must ask the question, "Why are there forty million poor people in America?" And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising questions about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy. ... We are called upon to help the discouraged beggars in life's market place. But one day we must come to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. It means that questions must be raised. You see, my friends, when you deal with this, you begin to ask the question, "Who owns the oil?" You begin to ask the question, "Who owns the iron ore?" You begin to ask the question "Why is it that people have to pay water bills in a world that is two-thirds water?" These are questions that must be asked.

Now don't think you have me in a bind today. I'm not talking about communism. What I'm saying to you this morning is that communism forgets that life is individual. Capitalism forgets that life is social, and the kingdom of brotherhood is found neither in the thesis of communism nor the antithesis of capitalism but in a higher synthesis. It is found in a higher synthesis that combines the truths of both. Now then I say question the whole society, it means ultimately coming to see that the problem of racism, the problem of economic exploitation, and the problem of war are all tied together. These are the triple evils that are interrelated.

...A nation that will keep people in slavery for 244 years will “thingify” them--make them things. Therefore they will exploit them, and poor people generally, economically. And a nation that will exploit economically will have to have foreign investments and everything else, and will have to use its military might to protect them. All of these problems are tied together. What I am saying today is that we must go from this convention and say, “America, you must be born again!”

...Let us be dissatisfied...I must confess, my friends, the road ahead will not always be smooth. There will be still rocky places of frustration and meandering points of bewilderment. There will be inevitable setbacks here and there. There will be those moments when the buoyancy of hope will be transformed into the fatigue of despair. Our dreams will sometimes be shattered and our ethereal hopes blasted. We may again with tear-drenched eyes have to stand before the bier of some courageous civil rights worker whose life will be snuffed out by the dastardly acts of bloodthirsty mobs. Difficult and painful as it is, we must walk on in the days ahead with an audacious faith in the future. And as we continue our charted course, we may gain consolation in the words so nobly left by that great black bard who was also a great freedom fighter of yesterday, James Weldon Johnson:

Stony the road we trod,
Biter the chastening rod
Felt in the days
When hope unborn had died.
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place
For which our fathers sighed?
We have come over the way
That with tears has been watered.
We have come treading our paths
Though the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the bright gleam
Of our bright star is cast.

Let this affirmation be our ringing cry. It will give us the courage to face the uncertainties of the future. It will give our tired feet new strength as we continue our

forward stride toward the city of freedom. When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe, working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.

Let us realize that William Cullen Bryant is right: "Truth crushed to earth will rise again." Let us go out realizing that the Bible is right: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." This is for hope for the future, and with this faith we will be able to sing in some not too distant tomorrow with a cosmic past tense, "We have overcome, we have overcome, deep in my heart I did believe we would overcome." ⁹

Closing Song: #149, *Lift Every Voice and Sing* ¹⁰

Closing Words, (Barack Obama)

At the ceremony dedicating the Washington memorial to Martin Luther King in October, President Obama's keynote address included the following remarks:

"Our work is not done. And so on this day, in which we celebrate a man and a movement that did so much for this country, let us draw strength from those earlier struggles. First and foremost, let us remember that change has never been quick. Change has never been simple, or without controversy. Change depends on persistence. Change requires determination. It took a full decade before the moral guidance of *Brown v. Board of Education* was translated into the enforcement measures of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, but those 10 long years did not lead Dr. King to give up. He kept on pushing, he kept on speaking, he kept on marching until change finally came.

And then when, even after the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act passed, African Americans still found themselves trapped in pockets of poverty across the country, Dr. King didn't say those laws were a failure; he didn't say this is too hard; he didn't say, let's settle for what we got and go home. Instead he said, let's take those victories and broaden our mission to achieve not just civil and political equality but also economic justice; let's fight for a living wage and better schools and jobs for all who are willing to work. In other words, when met with hardship, when

⁹ MLK, Jr., "Where Do We Go From Here," 1967. reproduced in James M. Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1986. p.249-252

¹⁰ Unitarian Universalist Association, *Singing the Living Tradition*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993. #149

confronting disappointment, Dr. King refused to accept what he called the “isness” of today. He kept pushing towards the “oughtness” of tomorrow.

... let us not be trapped by what is. We can't be discouraged by what is. We've got to keep pushing for what ought to be, the America we ought to leave to our children, mindful that the hardships we face are nothing compared to those Dr. King and his fellow marchers faced 50 years ago, and that if we maintain our faith, in ourselves and in the possibilities of this nation, there is no challenge we cannot surmount."¹¹

Extinguishing the Chalice, *Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

“All I'm saying is simply this, that all life is interrelated, that somehow we're caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.” Let us be dissatisfied, but let us overcome.¹²

Postlude, "Let there be Peace on Earth" by *Jill Jackson Miller and Sy Miller*, played by Katie Cross

¹¹ Barack Obama, At the ceremony dedicating the Washington memorial to MLK, October 16, 2011, as accessed at http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/full-text-president-obamas-speech-at-mlk-memorial/2011/10/16/gIQAkbl3oL_story.html 1/15/2012.

¹² Warren, Mervyn A.; Taylor, Gardner C. 2008. King Came Preaching: The Pulpit Power of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. InterVarsity Press. p. 174.